

ANTI-CANIDIA:

OR,

SUPERSTITION

DETECTED and EXPOSED.

IN A

CONFUTATION of the vulgar Opinion concerning WITCHES, SPIRITS, DEMONS, MAGICK, DIVINATION, OMENS, PROGNOSTICATIONS, DREAMS, AUGURYS, CHARMS, AMULETS, INCANTATIONS, ASTROLOGY, ORACLES, &c.

Then said Saul unto his Servants ; Seek me a Woman, that hath a familiar Spirit :—And his Servants said unto him ; Behold there is a Woman, that hath a familiar Spirit at En-dor.
1 Sam. xxviii. 7.

And when the Disciples saw him walking on the Sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a Spirit. Matth. xiv. 26.

Hunc igitur terrorem Animi, tenebrasque necesse est,
Non Radium Solis, neque Lucida Tela Diei
Discutiant, sed Naturæ species ratioque.

Lucret. Lib. 2. v. 58.

— Ne forte Animas Acherunte Reamur
Effugere, aut Umbras inter Vivos Volitare.

Lucret. Lib. 4. v. 41.

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AMTICANIDIA

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THE
P R E F A C E,

THE tyranny of *Superstition* over the minds of mankind has certainly been more extensive, more lasting, and despotick, than any other empire in the world ever was.

To attempt a resistance against it's dominion, during its strength, would have been only sacrificing to it what was least devoted: while a belief of Antipodes, which is certainly true; or a disbelief of transubstantiation, which is certainly false; were reckoned equal to the crimes of Socrates: and subjected the daring rebel to the spiritual discipline of the inquisition.

But in the present decline of it's power, when Ghosts and Spirits are delivered up as playthings to children;

dren ; it may not be a desperate enterprise to combat this mighty Coloffus. It is, I am conscious, a feeble hand, that here aims a blow, and it will be no wonder if one of the *first* attempts of this kind makes but little impression, but at least it may perhaps encourage some abler arm to push the tottering monster with greater force ; and fetch it to the ground.

It is hoped the author's honest intention *for* the interest of *pure* religion ; *for* the honour of God and Providence, in opposition to their adversaries ; *for* a rational construction of scripture, without injurious violence to the letter ; and his endeavour to protect weakness against the impositions of wickedness ; may plead his excuse for this trouble to the publick.

It had been easy to have swelled this little work with some reflections on *Talisman's*,—*sympathetic medicines*,—*second sightedness*,—*philtres*, &c. but if what is here only offered prove of any use
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to the end designed, it is enough : if it be not so ; it is too much : and I should be sorry to waste more of my reader's time, and my own.

The author of this tract was first prompted to this undertaking by a sally of indignation at the contemptible *wonder* in Cock-lane, that has lately made so much *noise* ; and the *more wonderful* attention paid to it, even by some persons of rank and character.

There is certainly nothing requisite to explode all ridiculous chimeras of this kind, but the *use* of a common share of sense and understanding : but to *have*, and to *use*, are *two* different things. We see this in the instance of the grave and wise Lord Clarendon, who could blot his excellent History of the *Rebellion* (as it is titled) by the narration of a story of this kind ; a story, not only presumed to be a gross forgery ; but even the credential *secret* of the imposter is now commonly supposed to be known.

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It is only the *reasonable* part of the world, to whose candid perusal the author is induced to recommend these sheets. The credulous herd, who are blindly prepared to swallow every thing with an implicit faith, he leaves to their own ignorance and weakness.—In the mountebank's oratory—*Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur.*

ANTICANIDIA.

CHAP. I.

Of witches, forcerers, &c. as mentioned in scripture: and of the witch of En-dor.

PERHAPS there never was any age or nation in the world, since the creation, in which superstition and an implicit captivity of the understanding has not prevailed. And it is equally true, that this folly has obtained in proportion, as ignorance and darkness have covered the minds of mankind.

Hence people are led to believe with ease things supernatural and wonderful; and to increase their blind faith, as probability itself decreases. And hence the fond credulity in witches and demons, in magick and divination, in omens and prognostications.

The want of knowledge in the laws of nature and providence, creates a belief contrary to nature, and the course of providence: till men become the dupes of their own ignorance; or of the deceit of people more artful and crafty than themselves.

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The sacred books themselves intimate how early this folly commenced in the world, by the statutes ordained against witchcraft and forcerys, by the law-giver Moses.—*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live* *.—*Seek not after wizards to be defiled by them* †.—*There shall not be found among you any one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizzard, or a necromancer* ‡. Nay long before this we find these arts seem to have been professed in Egypt, by what Joseph said to his brethren, upon the recovery of his cup: *Wot ye not, that such a man as I, can certainly divine* ||.

By all which, we are by no means led to conclude, that any devilish or supernatural power existed at the time of Pharaoh or Moses: or that any person whatever had ability to afflict their fellow-creatures, by the invocation of spirits, or by necromantic arts: but only that the law-giver fell in with the superstition of the people, and of the times; so far as in their own way to discourage all attention, all imagination about them; and to prevent all alienation of mind from obedience and reverence to the true God of Israel. Moses does not acknowledge the reality of these wicked foolerys; but only forbids all attempts

* Ex. xxii. 18. † Lev. xix. 31. ‡ Deut. xviii. 10.
|| Gen. xlv. 15.

tempts and conceits about them: in order partly to ease and pacify the minds of the vulgar; and partly to prevent the knavish designs of cunning and deluding impostors.

We know the gross and invincible ignorance of that people; such as may naturally be expected in minds uncultivated, enslaved, and bowed down, like their backs, to the burdens of Egypt. This rendered them easily capable of, nay prone to embrace the stupid and idolatrous superstitions of all their neighbours; notwithstanding all the revelations, and manifestations of a power really Divine. And this, you must see, rendered them equally capable of that superstitious senseless faith in magick powers, and witchcraft; which then, and ever since, has prevailed in the pagan world.

No wonder then, that even in the days of Saul, their forty years abode in the wilderness, or their four hundred years cohabitation with the Canaanites, had not wiped away these ignorant prejudices: or that even the king himself should be deluded, and weak enough to seek to the imaginary witch of En-dor. Though the circumstances of that story itself, as recorded in scripture, if fairly examined, will argue indeed the superstitious credulity, and prejudice of those times; but will by no means prove the real apparition of spirits; or the existence of magick powers, and witchcraft.

It would not be pertinent to my subject, to point out all the difficulties, that incumber this short history, as vulgarly received and construed: it shall be sufficient then only to observe,

1. From the woman saying, — *Whom shall I bring up?* says the king; *Samuel*. Whatever Saul might expect or believe, in those times of ignorance, under the infatuation and extreme disorder of his mind in distress; yet it cannot be credible to a rational understanding, to suppose it in the power of any human person, or of any evil spirit, to disturb the repose of a soul departed; and of all the deceased world, as well as of Samuel, if the enquirer might demand, — whom he would see. For though we know but little of souls, after their departure from the body, beyond what revelation has discovered: yet we know enough to presume, that a revocation of a spirit, from the earth, where it is not, (when it is returned to God, who gave it;) must be absurd and impossible.

2. Much less can the spirits of the best of men, the saints, and peculiar servants of God, be within the power of evil agents, thus to disturb them. Yet Samuel was *grievously* disturbed: for thus he complains to Saul; — * *Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?*

* v. 15.

3. To *see* a spirit, in the very terms implies an absurdity and contradiction ; as may perhaps be more-particularly observed hereafter. Yet the woman pretends to *see* Samuel, by her description of him, and his dress. Nay she pretends (more impudently absurd if possible) to see *Gods* ascending, as it were, out of the earth.

4. The woman saw Samuel ; upon which she immediately shrieks out, as if surprized and terrified to the last degree. Did she then distrust the force of her own art ? or was this pretence a part of the juggle, the better to carry on her cheat and deception ?

5. How can Samuel's *spirit* be supposed capable of speaking, and articulating answers, as a human voice ?

6. If Saul in the anguish of his mind could hope to obtain advice, by using violence to the spirit of the deceased, which he knew the prophet would not have given him, if alive : yet how can we rationally suppose, that *God* would answer Saul by the spirit of Samuel in an unjustifiable and devilish way of enquiry ? when we know he refused to answer him in the legal way by his prophets ; or by Urim and Thummim. Or could Saul believe *that* to be a true and *divine* answer, which was thus sought for, and extorted by devilish means ?

7. But these difficulties, which might otherwise seem to bear hard on the truth of the story itself, according to the common accepta-

tion, will all vanish and disperse of themselves, by observing in the last place, that it does not appear from the text itself that Saul ever saw this apparition of Samuel, or heard his voice : or, indeed, that he ever appeared at all. The woman pretended to see Samuel : upon which the king said to her,—*What form is he of?* implying by that very question, that he saw him not himself. She replies, as she might easily do, from the well known age and habit of the chief priest ; *He is an old man, and covered with a mantle.* And by this description only Saul perceived, or understood that it was Samuel : upon which *he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself,* which was rather hiding himself than seeing the apparition. The following conversation is apparently carried on, like a true juggle, by the mediation or intervention of the woman ; without any direct or visible intercourse between Saul and Samuel ; till at last the terrified and distressed king faints away in a swoon. Thus the hard improbabilities, that press the supposal of a real apparition, are easily accounted for : and thus the whole imaginary transaction is conducted and closed, as might be expected from any of the tribe of jugglers or fortune-tellers, by a scene of impudent imposture, cheat, and delusion.

C H A P. II.

That the scripture does not intend to teach the doctrine of witches, sorcerers or spirits, as of divine authority.

IN like manner as Moses, so the prophets have denounced the punishment of witches and forcerers. *I will cut off witchcraft out of thine band, saith Micah, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers* *. To the same purpose undoubtedly, as Moses himself had ordained penalties before: viz. to abstract the attention of people from those delusions and impostures; to create an aversion to the evil uses, that the heathens made of such superstitions, and to prevent the impositions of the crafty and more knowing.

It is evident to observe, that the mere mention of opinions or things in scripture, when they are not expressly taught, commanded, or declared; is by no means a rule to infer the truth, or existence of them. The sacred writings frequently adopt the use of vulgar language, and fall in with the ordinary prevailing notions of the times; without any intention to teach, support, or confirm such notions; or to give them the authority of divine revelation: but only to make them the more easily understood.

Thus

* Chap. v. ver. 12.

Thus when the scripture describes Joshua at the battle of Gibeon †, commanding the *sun and moon to stand still*: it by no means implies the real motion or diurnal revolution of the sun: and philosophy has since sufficiently proved the old vulgar opinion about it to be erroneous and false, without any impeachment of the scripture veracity.

And thus too, when the brazen sea of Solomon is described, as a *round vase ten cubits in diameter, and thirty in it's circumference ‡*: it is not meant to prove this to be the exact proportion of a circle's diameter to its periphery: and almost every mechanick now knows to the contrary.

But we know also that the scriptures are not intended to instruct us in philosophical, but in *divine* truths; not in speculative science, but in *moral* wisdom: and where no religious improvement is concerned; we are left to the use of our own *human* faculties, to extricate ourselves from vulgar prepossessions and prejudices.

Tho' Moses and the prophets therefore have *mentioned* witches, and forcerers, and incantations; it is in conformity only to the ignorance of those times, and in compliance to prevailing custom: they adapt their language to the established notions of that age and people. But in no place assert the real truth and existence of such devilish arts: much less do they intend

† Chap. x. ver. 13.

‡ 1 Kings vii. 23.

intend to *teach* their truth ; or to prove them, as the doctrines of faith in revealed religion.

We may farther observe, that arguments are frequently drawn from scripture, on many occasions, which in themselves are not direct and positive, but only consequential and presumptive. When these kinds of arguments are aided by natural reason, or tend to moral uses, they are just and conclusive : but applied to cases or things contrary to reason, or not subservient to moral ends ; they are of no force or validity at all : and nothing less than direct and positive assertion of scripture can command our faith and assent.

If then the apparition of spirits, or the power of witchcraft, be no where absolutely taught and declared ; and the notion itself be unreasonable, and without any tendency to moral uses : all arguments, from the contingent or occasional mention of them in scripture, are of this consequential kind only ; and of course inconclusive.

Many examples might be produced parallel to the subject we are speaking to ; which might serve both to illustrate and to confirm this observation : for instance, Exod. xxxii. 1. — *Make us Gods*, say the people to Aaron, *which shall go before us*. And we find both laws enacted by Moses, and penalties also announced by the prophets †; against *making Gods*. Yet whoever would argue

† Isaiah xlv. 17.

gue from hence, that therefore there really *are* more Gods than one ; and that they might be, and were *made*, even by human hands ; would not only be thought to reason very inconclusively from such consequential presumption : but even to affront and blaspheme both reason and scripture. It is the peculiar privilege of Roman Catholick ignorance and assurance, to believe themselves made by one God : and then, in order to be quit with their Creator, presume to make their God again.

But still it may be said ; Did Moses then enact laws against witches and forcerers to no purpose, and ordain punishments against a real nothing ? Is this consistent with the dignity of divine authority ? I answer, that divine authority in this case is not necessarily supposed to be concerned. As the penalties were temporal, so the laws themselves were civil, and imply no more than a civil legislative authority : and then there is nothing more extraordinary in it, than that the legislature of our own country should have done the same thing against the same crimes, that had no grounds or existence.

But if you insist, that the *prophets* also announce penalties in this case ; which plainly argue the interposition of divine authority against these wickednesses : yet still it may be replied, that these laws and penalties do nowhere positively assert the reality of the crimes prohibited : and that it was sufficient ground
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for the prohibitions, that the idolatrous neighbours of the Jewish people pretended to these evil arts. And therefore as all communication with them was intended to be prevented ; it might well become both the prophets, and the divine legislator, to forbid all tendency to the study of sciences ; which, tho' groundless and false in themselves, were yet by the vulgar of God's own people supposed to be *real* ; and looked on as one of the chief defilements and reproaches of the heathen.

We may argue in like manner upon the texts of the New Testament, where we find the *mention* of the apparition of spirits ; and the condemnation of wizzards and forcerers, as in the old law.—When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea, *They were troubled, saying, It is a spirit**. And again, after his resurrection,—*They were terrified, and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit†*. St. Paul says,—*They who are guilty of idolatry, witchcraft, &c. shall not inherit the kingdom of God‖*.—And St. John says, *Murderers, forcerers, and idolaters, &c. shall have their part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone§*.

The former of these passages are sufficient proof of the credulity of the age : and that those who were so affrighted *believed* the visibility of spirits, but are no proof at all of the *real* and *actual* apparition of spirits. And our

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* Math. xiv. 26. † Luke xxiv. 37. ‖ Gal. v. 20. § Rev. xxi. 8.

Saviour's reply to them is so far from *asserting* or *teaching* their real visible existence; that the contrary seems to be evidently presumed and implied. The disciples, when first they saw Jesus after his resurrection, were affrighted, and thought *they had seen a spirit*. He rebukes their simple fears, with saying, *A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have**. As if he had said, Your vulgar notions of apparitions are the effects of ignorance and weakness; and your foolish fears are superstitious and childish: for I am visible; because risen in the body; with my dying wounds upon me: but whatever is immaterial and purely spiritual, cannot, like a body, reflect the rays of light, by which things are visible: and consequently the apparition of a pure spirit, in the first idea of it, is absurd and impossible. *No man hath seen God at any time †; for this reason, because God is a spirit.*

I maintain not, that the paraphrase given of these words, is the proper, strict, and solely intended meaning of the text: but only that the words will very well bear that construction. All, that I propose to infer from hence, is, that the words do not necessarily imply; nor are any way intended to *teach*, or *prove*, the real apparition of spirits.

The like may be observed of the text quoted just before. *The disciples were troubled, and supposed they saw a spirit §.* Their fright was of

* Luke: xi. 39. † J. hn i. 18. § Matth. xiv. 26.

of the same vulgar kind, as their *notions* of *seeing* a spirit : arguments indeed of their human infirmity ; but none at all, for the *reality* of apparitions. For what other cause, but vulgar weakness was there for their fright ? They had been witnesses of our Lord's supernatural power ; they had seen his miracles often before ; without any other surprize, than a pious admiration. And if the weak passions and prejudices, common to those and succeeding times, had not possessed them ; there does not appear any reason, why they should be affrighted at seeing the same great worker of miracles walking on the sea. The whole proves their subjection to the vulgar prejudices of the times ; but not the justice of them ; not the real apparition of spirits.

C H A P. III.

That the apparition of spirits is highly absurd and irrational.

THE true ground of these prevailing fancies to this day, concerning ghosts and spirits, is, partly their long and habitual establishment in the world ; created at first by ignorance, and childish fear, in the days of illiterature and superstition ; and propagated down to modern times, by the same weak causes. Children suck them in almost with their first milk ; their nurses, no wiser than

them, encourage the deceit ; and so it is spread from one to another ; till they have lost the grounds, from whence their foolish imaginations were derived ; and never acquire strength enough of reason and judgement to examine their credibility, or to banish them afterward.

And partly the prevalence of these notions are owing to a want of resolution and courage enough in those, who are deceived by sudden appearances, to search the cause of their vain surprize ; and to satisfy, and undeceive themselves. For experience testifies, that whenever enquiry and examination is made to the bottom of these adventures, with sobriety and resolution ; the spirit itself vanishes, and the delusion becomes evident and plain.

The vulgar conceit therefore about ghosts and apparitions may, with the profoundest reverence to scripture, be deemed absurd and chimerical ; utterly inconsistent with all rational knowledge ; and unworthy the ideas we have, of God's providence, wisdom, and goodness. If we believe all the stories, that are vulgarly reported of them ; apparitions must be almost as common as living persons ; for who cannot tell some stories of them, which are not above one remove or two from his own personal knowledge ? But then it is observable, there is not one of these tales, but what generally is so removed. The apparition is always seen, as it were at second hand. And if we are to select

lect which we will choose to believe, and which discredit; what shall determine our faith and opinion; in stories equally attested, shall I say? or rather equally not attested at all?

And how should it be otherwise? Can we imagine the sovereign Creator of the world will pervert the order and course of providence; disturb the souls of persons departed to their separate state; and thereby work a miracle as great, as any of those, which the scripture records to have been wrought for the confirmation of the gospel itself? And this, if done so frequently as reported, only to depreciate the value of all miracles; and make them supposed to have been only the common effects of nature, rather than the extraordinary and divine interpositions of providence?

In particular; does not all this tend to invalidate one great and eminent proof of the truth of christian revelation,——by making miracles cheap;----subservient to insignificant and contemptible uses;---or rather to no use at all? The apostles urge in a special manner the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ, as the *fundamental* test of christian verity: but yet the return of spirits from the state of the dead; capable of visibility, speaking, walking, and the like human functions; is so near of kin to a real resurrection; so nearly equal to it in point of preternatural interposition; that, (when supposed common and familiar,) they render even that important miracle of our Saviour's

Saviour's own resurrection undistinguishable, and almost equal to no proof at all of his divine power, and of the truth of the gospel religion.

We may farther consider ; how is a spirit, in itself immaterial and invifible, to become the object of human fight ? how is it to acquire the appearance of *dress*, as well as form and shape ? how shall it appear, as is often vulgarly imagined, and why, in variety of shapes ;---like a dog, with faucer eyes, for instance, as well as like a human person ? the present celebrated ghost*, wisely to avoid the pressure of these scruples, has thought proper to appear in no shape at all, but the shape of knocking and scratching ; as Mompeffon's did in the shape of the sound of a drum.

Why is their appearance supposed to be confined to night and darkness ? but only those are the hours, when our servile fears are most awake ; when our imaginations are most fufceptible of delusions : and there is least possibility of discerning even real appearances. For certainly, in common reason, spirits have no more to do with night, than day-light ; and if any information was really providentially intended by them ; day-light, and publick places of resort, would be the properest for their apparition : when there might be witnesses enough of the gracious design intended by the supernatural appearance : and all could not fri-

* In Cock-lane.

frivolously end in the stupefaction and fright, or the deceitful testimony, of one individual person.

We may farther ask; By what power do these apparitions of departed spirits present themselves to human sight? if it is said; by their own: the possibility of it may well be questioned; for, as Abraham said to Dives in the parable, *Between us there is a great gulf fixed**; so that they, who would pass from hence to you cannot; no more than any one can pass from you to us, till called by mortality.—If by their own *self*-power departed spirits could return, and appear for the information of their living friends: it is probable that apparitions would be more common, than in the most superstitious times was ever believed. Few would want a parent, a wife, a husband, a child, a brother, or a friend; to warn them of dangers natural and moral; to check their career in error and folly: and to reduce them to the ways of virtue, prudence, and piety.

But if it be said to be, by the power of God: let it be farther asked; To what end, and for what good, is this extraordinary work of power; this interruption of the course of nature to be employed? If it was for the reclaiming of a sinner, and to save but one soul from everlasting perdition; it might be a cause worthy of divine interposition: and consequently in some degree credible. But that the sovereign being should wonderfully and miraculously interfere

* Luke xvi. 26.

fere to disturb the order of providence for the light, the trifling, the insignificant purposes, that are generally alledged, and supposed in these stories ; such as merely to affright and alarm us poor weak mortals ; and to create a superstitious awe, rather than a religious love : or at best, only to discover a butter pot full of money, buried in the cellar ; or a deed, or a will, of which the heir has been defrauded, hidden in a rotten chest, or behind the wainscot : these are ends so unworthy the dignity of providence ; so inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, as to become incredible ; and can only excite the indignation, rather than the attention, of a sober, serious, and rational mind.

C H A P. IV.

The sense of scripture concerning witches and sorcerers farther considered. And of the demonicks mentioned in the gospels,

BUT to return to the authorities of scripture : the texts, that we have quoted above *, denouncing the punishment of diviners and sorcerers, is not intended as an argument of their real existence : but shews, as we said, a compliance with the same vulgar errors, that prevailed still as in the time of Moses. And as the gospel was not designed to destroy the law, but to fulfil ; we see it constantly

* Gal. v. 20. Rev. xxi. 8.

stantly conforming it's language, to the modes, and customs, and prejudices of the law ; whenever there appeared no inducement or cause to contradict the ancient opinions in speculative matters : it uses the same kind of language, as might be natural to expect from disciples educated in Jewish prejudices ; and speaks to the same people, in the same stile, that the law had done before : and leaves the world either to retain their old ignorant notions ; or to get rid of them by the use of philosophy, and their own reason. For certainly to root out every foolish error in opinion ; or every notion of ignorance and illiterature, is unworthy the employment of a divine revelation.

The New Testament, then, as we have observed of the Old, does not concern itself to rectify mistakes, and false apprehensions, where the *practice* of religion itself is not interested in the error: (and a wrong belief implies not always a danger of wrong, and unrighteous practice.) As a farther confirmation of this observation ; we find Peter, seeing the disciple, whom Jesus loved, following ; saith to him, *Lord ! and what shall this man do ?* Jesus saith unto him ; *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ?* Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die : yet Jesus said not un'o him, *He shall not die ; but if I will that he tarry till I come ; what is that to thee * ?*

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* John xxi.

The like observations might be made, with respect to erroneous opinions, concerning the time itself of our Saviour's second coming:— concerning the nature of the kingdom, which he came to establish, and which they supposed was to be a kingdom of this world:— and concerning also some other mistaken apprehensions, even among the apostles themselves; which easily apply themselves to the point we are proving.

But the most remarkable instance of this kind, which I shall therefore particularly insist on, because it has a more immediate connection to the subject in view; is that of the demoniacks in the gospel. We frequently read of Jesus casting out devils (or demons) from the bodies of men. And the general vulgar notions of *those* times, and of all times since, with the ignorant and illiterate, seems to have been; that demons, or evil spirits entered, possessed, and were incorporated in the bodies of certain diseased persons; and cohabited as it were with the human soul. Yet a little reflexion on, and examination of the matter, will prove the falsity and impossibility of such an absurd and senseless opinion: and lead us to conclude, with a certain late illustrious physician *, that all those possessions were no other than common epileptick fits, or convulsive agitations, or some similar distemper; which

* Dr. Mead De Morbis Sacris.

which mankind were then, and still are subject to.

For why do we so *frequently* read of demoniacks in the gospel, in our Saviour's time ; and yet find scarce any mention of them before, or any authentick accounts of them since that time ; in cotemporary authors of other countries ? but only that demoniacal possession was a name given in Judea to certain epileptick or convulsive diseases ; whose *effects* were obvious, but the *causes* of them were not understood by the people. We cannot surely suppose this a distemper providentially created, purely for the subject of part of our Saviour's miracles.

Could demons personally possess the bodies of mankind at their own option ? if so ; by what kind of power did they do it ? if you say, (as must be,) by their own ; who can believe that a merciful and gracious God would subject his innocent creatures, without distinction, to the malice, tyranny, and torment of infernal spirits ? and if it was morally possible in one age and country ; why has it not been so, in all countries, and in all ages before and since ? besides, it sadly exposes them to contempt ; and argues the short limitations of their power ; to see by what weak hands they were sometimes ejected, and put to flight ; for our Saviour himself, in his dispute with the Jews, who blasphemed him, argues

as if *their own sons* were used to cast them out *. And we know that the seven sons of one Sceva affected this authority †: but with shame certainly to these imaginary demons; when the exorcist succeeded; and the *preternatural* power gave way to the *human*:—with shame to the exorcists, when their attempts miscarried, and they *fled away naked and wounded*. Either therefore these exorcists were much like those of the Roman church, for more than a thousand years past,—cheats and impostors; or they only attempted by natural means the cure of natural distempers.

If demoniacks were possessed by any real spirits, or evil beings; it might be very natural to presume the agitations, or symptoms attending them, should be of the *spiritual* kind; and affect the *morals*, rather than the *corporeal* faculties of the patients: so that *diabolical passions*, blasphemies and *moral impurities* were more reasonable to be expected, than *deafness* and *dumbness*, convulsions and distortions of body, which are all natural disorders. But we find the *mental* faculties, or spiritual abilities of the possessed rather impaired in general, than augmented: unless the instance of the maid, who cried after St. Paul, be an exception; *who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying* ‡. But it is remarkable in this case, that the word, which
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* Matt. xii. 17. † Acts. ‡ Acts xvii.

we translate—a spirit of divination, is, in the original,—a python: an expression, not properly signifying a demoniacal or prophetick spirit; but a name,—a common name given to the chief-priestess of the heathen oracles. And if this girl's spirit was only of the same kind with the priestess's, as the name itself testifies; she may very well be classed with those enthusiastick, raving, artificially mad women, who conducted the heathen imposture.

Who can believe wicked and malicious spirits, capable of possessing and tormenting mankind; unless by the extraordinary commission of God? and in that case, why should the same extraordinary power be employed, to counter-act itself in casting them out?

If they could seize the bodies of men by their *own* power; why not at any time, and at all times, before and since our Saviour's appearance in the world?

Why did the demons seem to suffer, and intreat for indulgence, upon their ejection? since they might, by the same self-power, have entered the bodies of new patients, as they at first entered the former, from whence they were cast.

We may farther demand; if one single demon could give such terrible agonies to the distempered patient; what human strength could support the conflict with seven; or with a whole legion of them together?

Many

Many more observations might be made, to argue the absurdity and impossibility of separate evil spirits possessing and afflicting the natural bodies of men; though in a moral sense, they may be sometimes said to possess their souls; when God judicially hardens and chastizes human sinners. I should presume this to be the case of Saul; into whom it is said *an evil spirit from the Lord entered* *.

But perhaps what has already been hinted is sufficient to lead us to conclude, that the demoniacks in the gospel were no other than patients afflicted with epileptick, convulsive, or some such kind of distempers; which our Saviour miraculously healed, as he did many other kinds of *natural* distempers. But that he did not think it necessary to correct the erroneous conceit of the people, concerning demoniacal possession: because the rectifying such an inveterate error might have been exceeding difficult; and could not immediately tend to any moral improvement: and because the cure of what they reckoned demoniacal madness (like the cure of other natural diseases) was as real a miracle, as a conquest of demons could have been; and argued the same divine power in Jesus Christ, as his healing all other sickness and diseases among the people did, by his absolute word, and command.

I con-

* 1 Sam. xviii. 10.

I conclude also, that the New Testament, like the Old, adapts its stile to the notions of the vulgar, in its language about spirits, witches, and forcerers; as it seems to do here on the subject of demoniacks, and on vulgar errors in general.

C H A P. V.

That witchcraft and sorcery are highly absurd and irrational. The history of Simon Magus considered.

AN extravagant vulgar error, very much parallel to that we have been speaking of, and perhaps derived from it; has prevailed ever since the time of our Saviour, even to this day. Any strange and violent distemper in Judea, the symptoms of which could not be physically accounted for; or which would not yield to medicine, and the ordinary arts of cure; were in those days called demoniacal: and ignorantly attributed to the extraordinary possession of demons. — Since that, in the christian ages, down to our own times; similar distempers, or any others attended with uncommon violent symptoms, that resisted the prescriptions of quacks and empiricks, were with equal ignorance attributed to the devil's agency; and called witchcraft. — A very well chosen conceit to cover ignorance and unskilfulness in the dispensers

pensers of medicine; and to delude and impose upon the cajoled patient.

This power of witchcraft, according to the vulgar notion of it, is a preternatural power: yet not supposed to be connate with any one; for who ever suspected a witch, or a wizzard, among infants and children? how then is it to be acquired? how are men to commence their commerce with Satan, to covenant with him to invest them with it? will age? will a prominent tooth? will an old woman's length of beard, or chin, determine her qualification to have it conferred? this were ridiculous to suppose. And if not so: how shall this power be conveyed, or contracted for? where does Satan hold his court, to grant licences for infernal mischief?

And if a means of commerce with the arch-traitor could be found out: (which yet seems much more wonderful and difficult to comprehend, than any thing it is supposed to enable men to do:) yet who would attempt or desire to obtain it, only for the sake of doing a little temporal mischief to others: and to end, (without any present advantage to themselves,) in their own certain eternal perdition?

Do persons, merely because wicked, know more of Satan, and the means of covenanting with him; than the learned, the wise, and the good *can* do? it is certainly hard to give a reason, why we should think so. Can they
meet,

meet, converse, and compact with that prince of darkness; whom nobody knows to be ever visible; or to be known at all, but by spiritual operations, temptations, and suggestions?

Beside; wickedness alone is not a qualification to obtain this imaginary power: for the worst of men have not been suspected to have had it: and yet have been able to do infinitely more extensive, and cruel mischiefs, than those who have been ignorantly presumed to be possessed of it. And indeed *they* seem to want it least; who are most capable of malevolence, by their own evil nature and disposition.

Why are witches supposed to be armed with preternatural power, only to do mischief? and yet those mischiefs comparatively speaking, are generally trifling, childish, and insignificant. Do their powers extend only to giving pigs the cramp; — to set children a spewing pins and needles, that nobody ever saw; — or to ride on a hurdle, or a broom-stick, nobody knows whither? Why can not the same preternatural power be ever displayed in works of visible significance, eminence, and report?

If witchcraft be a devilish power; as must be supposed, by being employed only to do hurt: who can prove that the devil himself, or any demoniacal spirits, can confer such powers on any human creature? It is reasonable

to suppose they can *not* ; unless by particular commission of the sovereign Creator. — Who then can suppose, that a good and gracious God will grant, or permit to be granted a preternatural power to any agent ; only to torment, and destroy, or do mischief to his innocent creatures ? and who can suppose such a power should be granted to the most depraved and wicked ; which in all ages has been generally denied to the best of men ?

This interrogatory way of arguing may perhaps displease the favourers of vulgar errors ; and be deemed the want of more positive argument and proof. But indeed it is hard to combat shadows, and creatures of imagination only ; in any other way, than by appeal to reason and common sense. We never have yet been told distinctly and descriptively what these chimerical creatures are, and how they exist : the blank denial of them therefore is a fair part of their confutation. Let us then proceed to ask once more ; Why are there believed to be fewer witches and demons now in these kingdoms, than in former days ? and why are they generally less credited here, than in Catholick countries ; where ignorance and superstition, mixt with priestly cunning, have totally captivated and enslaved the minds of the common people ?

Why ? the reason is plain : all these ridiculous deceits and errors are owing to the defects of knowledge and literature, on one part ;
and

and to design and trick on the other: ignorance is the mother of superstition, easily persuaded to swallow wonders; and the most marvellous becomes the most credible.

The church of Rome had gained such an ascendancy over the faith and consciences of their deluded votaries; that nothing was so impudently absurd and incredible, but their authority could make them believe it. Such, for instance, were the conversations of St. Bernard with the devil: and such is the story of the British St. Dunstan's taking him by the nose with a pair of red hot tongs. Their legends are full of such idle tales, which, if they try not their disciples faith, may at least, serve to set them a laughing.

But the noble art of printing gave birth to the revival of learning: and the glorious reformation of religion, which commenced soon after, gave a new check to this gross superstition and fallacy. We have happily ever since improved the means afforded us, to eradicate these prejudices and vulgar errors. And we experience every day, that as science and learning increases, the vulgar notions of spirits, apparitions, witches, and demons, decrease and die of themselves. But yet the total extirpation of opinions and prejudices, which have grown inveterate by the encouragement of many centuries, must be expected to be a work of time. Reason and philosophy have already done a great deal towards it: time, and

a farther improvement in letters will do the rest.

Though the reformation soon went a great way, in the illumination of ignorance, and the suppression of Popish errors: yet still some share of them stuck very close for a long time after: and *that* not in the opinion of the vulgar only. A royal hand* gave the world a treatise of learned ignorance upon the subject of demonology, about a century and a half ago. And what wonder then, if in *that*, and the next reign, we read † of hundreds suffering for witchcraft in these two kingdoms: and not a very small proportion of that number, in one county only.

Improvements of reason, learning, and the reformed religion have since that time happily gone on to dissipate these idle chimera's. The legislative power has wisely declared their sentiments upon it, in abolishing the old penal laws ordained against the wild fancies of an ignorant brain. So that the last execution we have heard of upon this subject, is not that of a witch; but for the rash murder of a woman foolishly so reputed §.

May the reformed religion proceed to exterminate all the errors of popery; and all the false opinions, that it has ever ignorantly or craftily espoused; till we are presented a holy church, without spot or blemish, to Jesus Christ.

* King James I. † Vid. Whitlock's Memoirs,

§ Of Tring in Hertfordshire.

Christ. May religious and useful learning increase ; till reason teaches us to deride all impositions about witches, and demons ; as revelation has already taught us, *that the Son of God was manifested* for this very purpose,—*that he might destroy the works of the devil* *.

But what shall we say then of Simon, fir-named Magus ? who in scripture indeed is said to have *bewitched* the people with his forceries : *And to him the people gave heed from the least to the greatest, because of a long time he had bewitched them with his forceries* †. Say of him ? why that the scripture here, as usual, adapts itself to the language and opinions, that were current : that Simon either acted by the rules of philosophy and science ; or affected and pretended to do so ; *by which he got great reputation among the people ; and made himself to be thought some great one* : as the famous Friar Bacon did by his superior skill in philosophy, particularly in the use of optic glasses : and as any optician or chymist might still do among the vulgar people ; and produce such prodigies to them, as would lead them to believe him master of a supernatural power. And perhaps after all, for any thing that appears to the contrary, Simon's deep skill and cunning in drawing the wonder of the people, amounted to no more than that of one of our modern gypsies, or fortune-tellers : unless a difference lies in the gross ignorance of the people dealt with.

But

* 1 John iii 8.

† Acts viii.

But it is farther observable, that *Magus* does not in the original signify what we are now apt to understand by magician ; as we may perhaps take farther notice presently. Neither does it imply the exercise of any diabolical or supernatural power ; or the working any real miracles or prodigies ; but only that Simon acted in character of one of the Eastern Magi ; exhibiting the wonders of art, and science, and natural philosophy, to the amazement of the people ; or perhaps only his *pretending* to do so, and barely imitating, or counterfeiting the effects of their learning. He gave out himself to be somebody : and he acted his part so well, as to obtain his end : he struck the vulgar people with surprize and veneration : and to him *they gave heed*, or attention, saying, *This man is the great power of God*. If his arts and practices were supposed to be infernal, and derived from the devil ; they could not, at the same time, be ascribed to the *great power of God*. But the devilish practices of witchcraft or sorcery, according to the common use of the words, are no where directly imputed to him : he is not charged with the wickedness of such devilish works of malevolence and darkness : nor are any particular and real powers, above human, to be proved upon him. The apostle reproves him indeed, and bids him *repent of his wickedness* ; but of what wickedness ? of actual witchcraft and sorcery ? No such thing. Simon wondered as much at the *real* miracles

and signs of Philip and Peter, as the ignorant people did at him. But yet his affectation of magiism, his vanity to be considered as somebody ; and his actually deluding the ignorant multitude by his imposture, (though sins reprehensible ;) were yet not sins of such a nature, as to hinder his own real belief of *christian* veracity and power ; and obtaining thereby a convert's baptism. Peter knew he was master of no such base arts as were pretended ; he knew there really were none such ; and that at most, he could be only guilty of affecting them ; and by such affectation deceiving the people. But his real wickedness was, — *Because he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money.*

CH A P. VI.

Magick, divinations, omens, &c. refuted and exposed.

THE ancient magi, from whence magick derives its name, were originally the men of learning and real science of the East ; by which qualifications they deserved and won the reverence of mankind. These were the *wise men of Babylon* : and of these the prophet Daniel himself was by authority of Nebuchadnezzar appointed archimagus or chief *. But in time they learned to abuse this esteem bestowed

* Dan. v. 11.

stowed upon them: and then endeavoured to preserve and support it by sinister arts and inventions. What the people had justly granted at first to their philosophy and merit; they afterwards strove to heighten by trick and deceit. Hence instead of professors of wisdom, the magi degenerated into teachers of superstition, and imposers upon men's credulity: and laboured to retain the veneration they had fairly gained, by base delusion and imposture.

Another abuse of magiism or magick, similar to that of sorcery and witchcraft, was the exploration of futurities by divination, omens, and prognostications. The conceit of divinations appears to have been at least as old as the times of Joseph; (as already observed :) it is probable that Egypt was the place of its birth. However, it seems to have spread as far as Mesopotamia in the days of Balaam, who was brought from thence † to exercise divinations and enchantments against the people of Israel. The folly of his art, where God was pleased to interest himself, sufficiently appears from the event of all his preparations. However it gained ground sufficient to spread itself through the unilluminated pagan world, till it seemed to have gotten possession of the whole.

Nay, so universally did it prevail; that one would be apt to think, that every cheat and impostor invented their own favourite modes
of

† Numb. xxii.

of divination.—To attempt to describe them at large would be a vain and tedious labour, and a pitiful waste of time : yet were they not more various and innumerable, than frivolous and contemptible. The most solemn, and indeed expensive manner of fortune-hunting was, by poring into the entrails of sacrifices : but other prognosticks of lower price were to be purchased. Sometimes by throwing dice, sometimes by dreams, sometimes by glass, by water, or rings : at other times the use of the sieve, the hatchet, and the sheers, the screams of ravens, or the screeching of an owl, or the more portentous prodigy of a crowing hen, were severally employed by the learned jugglers to denounce the fates and fortunes of fools.

Onirocritical divination in particular is celebrated by Homer ; tho' doubtless older than the siege of Troy. Perhaps the first hints of it might be derived from the providential dreams of Pharaoh, and their *divine* interpretations. But certainly the subsequent use of it, as a common prognostication of events, if it be not a prophanation of what was originally sacred ; is at least an abuse of sense and reason ; in all, who are not dreaming still, tho' with their eyes open.

The ancients first invented likewise lucky moments and auspicious days ; nay, even the emperor Augustus, in the height of Roman learning, was not great enough to be superiour

to them; and to despise them. May not the apostle possibly allude to some of these heathen fooleries, as well as to the superstition of the Jews, in blaming them for their *observation of days, and months, and times, and years?* *

The divinations and omens of more modern times, stupid and foolish as they are, are yet only the copies of the heathen theologists; but industriously preserved and propagated by Roman Catholick craft and policy, in the times of darkness and ignorance: and not yet, as we too plainly experience, dissipated by the later improvements in learning; nor quite worn out by length of time since the reformation. We still retain a faith in the formidable omen of a death watch, and the mysterious power of odd numbers: shall I mention the omen of dreams, and of salt spilled; the divination by lines in the hands, by cards, and by casting coffee-grounds? There would be indeed no end in collecting all the modern superstitions, that might be noted: and yet truly it is but little we have been able to add to the precious stock of the ancients: the merit of invention is almost all theirs: and we in general only transcribe and adopt those of two or three thousand years old.

But the mention of these things is, with solid minds, enough to betray their vanity and folly: the recollection of them is a disgrace and shame to all their abettors and

favourers.

* Gal. iv. 10.

favourers. With what justice of indignation does the prophet call them all lies and madness, in contra-distinction to divine veracity? *The Lord*, saith he, *frustrateth the tokens of lyars; and maketh diviners mad; and confirmeth the word of of his servant* *.

The mention of these fooleries, I say, is their shame; and at this period, under the present improvements of philosophy and learning, is sufficient to confute them; with all, at least, but the dregs of mankind. For what connection is there between these superstitious observances or practices, and the events of human life? what a difference between these follies; and the superintendance of a divine providence? If they could really mean any thing; yet who has power to be their interpreter? and who has ever yet shewn his authority for it? We may ask, in the words of the Jews to our Saviour;—*What sign shewest thou, that we may believe?* By what evidence know we that the event is predicted by the omen?

Do these creatures, the instruments of superstition, both animate and inanimate, know the future fates and fortunes of men? It were a shame even to pretend it: and, if not; how then can they teach it? But if it pleased providence to presignify either mortality in a family, or any other important events; would it not speak in a language to be understood?

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would

* Isaiah xliv. 25.

would it not signify its notices by plain and evident characters; not liable to misconstruction and error? Can we imagine it worthy the wisdom of God to reveal his future decrees to mankind, by the howling of a dog; or by the screeching of an owl; by the flapping of a pigeon's wing; or by tinkling of a bell? Certainly wheresoever divine information is intended; we shall not be left, as in such like instances, to error and misinterpretation. The whole is therefore the fond credulity and superstition of the vulgar; improved by the artful deceit of impostors; sanctified by remote antiquity; and handed to *us* by popish fraud and knavery.

It is a long and scandalous catalogue indeed, that we have of these delusive treacherous inventions; all of them current, in the former days of darkness and stupidity: and too many still credited by the vulgar and illiterate, not in Catholick countries only. But let it be considered; if these ridiculous tricks and conceits are not founded on truth *now*; neither were they so, when generally believed: and if not all, or any of them true *then*; neither are they so *now*. And if divinations, omens, and prognostications, be only the result, and effect of superstition on one part; and of fraud on the other: then so are all the other tribes of delusion,—spirits, witches, and demons: children and fools are now chiefly in possession of them: and they are fit for none else.

C H A P. VII.

Charms, amulets, incantations, astrology, &c. refuted and exposed. Of the royal touch for the evil.

BY the same reasoning are all charms, amulets, and incantations, to be justly exploded; as gross impositions upon weakness and folly. Do the dealers in this delusive trumpery affect any supernatural power? if they do not; they mean nothing. If they do: let it then be asked, whether it is derived from God, or the devil? They will be ashamed and confounded to *own* the one: the other they will want assurance to pretend to. And we know of no other invisible powers in the world.

From whence then can any operative influences be derived; or what can they be ascribed to; when expected to cure eyes or agues? Can mere words and syllables have any natural powers at all? can there be any virtue or efficacy in the force of letters, or language; in triangles, squares, or circles? The first reflexion of reason upon them proclaims their absurdity and stupidity: the mean credulity of the patient gives them all the virtue they could ever boast of: they are of a piece with the grave and wise Cato's charm for a luxation or
a frac-

a fracture * ; which we still have upon record : and which will ever stand a disgrace to common sense and reason ; and remain a standing argument, how far even the wise, as well as the vulgar, could in times of ignorance prostitute their understandings to their credulity ; and fall in with the epidemical rage of superstition. Let then such vain, such ignorant delusions, now hide themselves, and flee away : arts they may be called ; but of no effect, but what the tame surrendry of common sense gives them. The workers in such curious arts may burn their books ; and *value them*, if they please, *at fifty thousand pieces of silver* † : the works themselves are but bubble and deceit ; and their books in reality not worth one farthing.

Of the same stamp may be justly reckoned all cœlestial omens, portents, and astrological predictions. There have been times, when an eclipse has determined the issue of battles, and the fate of armies ; when a comet, or a conjunction of planets, have been supposed to portend revolutions in states ; and to prognosticate the fate of kingdoms. But true astronomical knowledge has now effectually dissipated these
weak

* Cato's receipt for a luxation or fracture. Take a reed : split it length ways with a knife : apply the parts to each other again, and tie them. Then throw the joyned reed over your head pronouncing these words. *Huat, Hanat, Huat : Ista, Pista, Fides : Domiabo, Damnaustra.*—And the bone or luxation shall grow sound again. Vid. Philaleutherus Lipsiensis.

† About seven or eight thousand pounds sterling. Acts xix. 19.

weak and vain conceits, with all but the most ignorant and superstitious part of mankind. And Cæsar's murder was evidently neither the cause nor effect of the sun's obscurity about the time of his death ; if any such defect of light was real, or any thing more in fact, than the superstition of his friends, and a defect of light in their partial understandings. We mean not to deny here, that the cœlestial luminaries have *any* effects on this sublunary world : their mutual attractions and perturbations are now well known : and what distributions of vapour, or other matter, may be disseminated into the solar system, by the tails of comets, may in some measure be now presumed, and guessed at : but still all these effects are under the same steady uniform laws of nature and providence, by which they constantly and regularly dispense to us light and heat.

In the same roll with this kind of bigotry and deceit we may reckon the imaginary virtue of the *royal touch* ; the credit of which, for the cure of one certain *evil*, had been established for so many hundred years. We read indeed of the emperor Vespasian in *one* instance curing a blind man by the imperial touch. And we hear of many eyes and evils cured by old women, by the force of words, not quite so hard and uncouth as the ancient *Abracadabra*. We must own too the peculiar power and influence of the touch of gold. But with all these concessions, if the origin and grounds of this

this dignified miracle be fairly examined ; it will be found in the highest degree shamefully absurd and ridiculous ; of equal authority, and equal credibility with the marvellous cures wrought by the shrines or relicks of Romish saints.

The commencement of the royal power of healing began in the person of *Edward the Confessor* ; dispensed to a woman, warned in a vision to apply to the king ; who is said to have cured her *barrenness*, as well as her sores. And this particular virtue is *pretended* to have been hereditarily transmitted to posterity down to late times.

But tho' this holy confessor appears by his history to have had no peculiar sanctity, more than a blind bigotry and devotion to the Romish church : yet several other miracles are equally recorded of him, as well as this : in particular his having restored to sight several blind persons, more than is told of Vespasian. Why then was not the faculty of curing the *blind* too made hereditary, as well as any other disease ?

And why is this virtue attributed to his *royalty*, rather than to his *sanctity* ? If royalty was better intitled to it, why did not every christian sovereign equally enjoy it ? but if only his *confessorship* qualified him with the common powers of Romish saints : then the power itself becomes purely personal ; and must have expired with the man.

If

If again regality was to be distinguished by this supernatural faculty : why were the cures very *uncertain*, and defective in most instances : if ever any were wrought at all ? why were they *gradually* effected in the manner that medicine is used to operate ; and as if nature itself contributed to the work ? why was not the cure *instantaneously* accomplished ; the more eminently to display the divinity of the miracle, and thereby more irresistably to convince the doubting sceptick ?

But the truth is ; a great part of the *old* English history is collected and compiled from the chronicles and memoirs of monkish writers ; and from the records of religious houses. And sorry I am, that we should have no better vouchers, no juster authority, for a large part of the history of our country.

These chronicles are full of miracles, and preposterous stories, recorded with no other end and design, but to celebrate the saint, to whom those houses were dedicated, and to propagate superstition : to this purpose nothing could be conceived too absurd and too false for their forgery. But *one* vein of audacious partiality and falsity runs through the whole : every sovereign, who devoted himself to their priestly authority ; and impoverished himself, and the people, for the wealthy endowments of monasteries ; was sure to be celebrated as a saint, a confessor, a worthy prince : every one who attempted to shake off their spiritual shackles, and to consult the civil inter-

rests and welfare of the people ; was equally sure to be branded for a tyrant, an impious wretch, and almost an heretick.

It is farther to be noted, in opposition to the confessor's vain pretensions; that no cotemporary author, that we know of, ascribes this virtue of healing to him. It is therefore probable that this, like other Romish miracles, began to be attributed to him ; when the man was almost forgotton : and only the memory of the saint was revived, for the sake of imposing on the credulous vulgar. It is fairly presumable that his canonization, and his miracles, might be thought of together ; the former of which was not started till at least two hundred years after his death.

What a worthy foundation then of a most wonderful miracle by a living saint and confessor ! outdone a hundred times, by (the old shoe of) that humble high-priest *Becket*, after he had been long dead.

But how comes this marvellous power to be *intailed* on the royal line, through so many successive generations, as is pompously pretended ? This is a privilege never granted by Almighty God to any of the saints or prophets, or apostles recorded in scripture. Was the royal confessor *superiour* to any of them ? This in modesty we shall hardly dare to say : and yet without it, the efficacy of the royal touch must have been extinguished long ago. Nothing but popish ignorance and credulity on one hand, and popish presumption and imposture on the other ;

other ; could have so long supported and propagated so groundless and senseless a fallacy.

This is perhaps the only miraculous power, that has ever been pretended to be hereditarily transmitted to posterity : which consideration alone may be no small prejudice against our faith in it. But moreover it happens unluckily that the hereditary succession itself of our kings, within little more than thirty reigns since the confessor, has been interrupted almost half so many times. What became then of the efficacy of the wonder-working power upon these infractions ? To answer this difficulty I am totally at a loss ; and fear the patrons of superstition will be no less so.

It seems then as if the hereditary efficacy of the royal touch had as little foundation to support it, as that old tyrannical absurd doctrine of hereditary right to dominion. Had the Duke of Monmouth thought of *this* notable expedient ; it might have saved him the more dangerous appeal, against King James, to the lions in the Tower ; to try, as is said, their title and competition of hereditary right : and the test of the touch might have been as wise, and as good, as the distinguishing faculty of those surly beasts.

Let this then go along with the other tribes of monkish tales, and forged miracles : let bigots and tyrants lean on such *brokenreeds*. And be it the glory of the family of his present majesty,

majesty, not to be a confessor, at the expence of the protestant religion : and to have forfeited all the imaginary powers and virtues, that Rome can confer ; for the sake of that *one virtue* of securing the civil rights and liberties of the British people.

C H A P. VIII.

The Pagan oracles, and Sybilline books, considered and exposed.

IN the first rank of the divining class may well be reckoned the *Oracles*, so much in vogue with the heathen world. Possibly the hint of the invention of them might be taken from their intercourse with the *Jewish* people, and derived from them. The one consulted the eternal God for divine information at the ark of the covenant, by Urim and Thummim : the others applied to deities of their own creation to investigate futurities.

The most famous oracles in the world were, that of Jupiter at Dodona, and that of Apollo at Delphi. But why the *most famous* ? Could the infallible fountains of truth and knowledge be *preferable* to one another ? are there *degrees* of infallibility and omniscience ? This argues some suspicion that all was but trick and invention : and that the credit of the oracle, in the times of their highest prosperity, depended very much upon the art and cunning of their priests

priests and managers. But from other circumstances it is very certain that it was so. They were not always impowered to give any answers at all, when their credit might be notoriously hazarded. And it is as certain, that the answers they gave, when obtained, were not always true: But only when they blundered and betrayed; they had commonly the address to lay the blame upon the interpreter: so that when the *meaning* of the oracle (which had originally no meaning at all) was by its ambiguity mistaken, or happened to deceive; the fault was not Apollo's, but the unfortunate expounders: and so they had always a reserve and salvo to bring them off.

But what? can a divine revelation of the gods be dark, mysterious, or ambiguous? it is a contradiction in terms. Can one oracle want another to explain it? it is absurd, and impossible. The very end of consulting oracles must have been,—to clear up doubts,—to resolve mysteries,—and to dissipate obscure uncertainties; and not to involve the inquirers deeper in them. Revelation and mystery are totally opposite and incompatible. And yet this was the case with the heathen oracles in general: and hence the inquirer, when able, often consulted *many* oracles on the same point; led to it by the experience of their fallibility and deception; and that *no one*, in the height of it's credit, was to be trusted: and often he was deceived by them all.

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The reason of all this could be no other, than that they were at best but cheats and delusions ; the engines and tools of politicians and princes. They gave the oracle *being* at first, and they generally governed the people ; they often gave the answers, that were returned to them again. And hence, in the time of Demosthenes, he justly complained that the Delphic oracle itself did *philippize* ; i. e. gave such responses as Philip king of Macedon would have : and prostituted its imaginary veracity to the authority of the king.

The oracles therefore were only impostures and bubbles, to cheat the vulgar. Their priestess's ravings, foamings, distortions, and convulsions, were tricks to amuse and deceive the ignorant people. And these, with all other preparations to consult them, were indeed well adapted to strike the inquirer with awe and veneration ; but very bad signs of real divinity ; and utterly inconsistent with the dignity and sobriety of any real inspiration. And hence it is observable, that when science increased ; and consequently their knowledge, or rather their ignorance and delusion began to be suspected : some of them deserted their old seats in Greece ; and fled to the Hyperborean regions of the Scythians ; in whose darkness their imposture was more easily maintained.

We see then the very foundation of oracles were nothing but the contrivance of artful men ; tho' soon believed in by the ignorant as divinities.

divinities, Probably nothing but a blind passion in mankind for prediction and soothsaying; and a fondness for delusion, alway prevalent in vulgar illiterate minds; could ever have encouraged at first the artful and designing oracular pretenders, to presume to impose so much upon human understandings, and to rule men by their own foibles. Their knowledge was founded only upon the ignorance of the people: the credit of the one rested upon the blind implicit faith of the other; supported indeed often, as we observed, by civil power; because princes could rule those oracles themselves, that ruled the people; and draw such answers from them, as they first required, and as best served their policy. But could the Pythian priestesses, do we think, denounce or predict any surer truths, by being transported with passion; or agitated with fury and ravings? or rather, was not this a more likely way to eclipse and confound the little understandings they had? Their pretence to prophecy therefore was mere imposition: their inspiration by an oracular spirit was mere impudence, presumption, and craft.

The priests and priestesses, and their confederates, were the only oracles; by which confederacy they sometimes drew from the deluded inquirers, or explored by their correspondencies, that secret, which they afterward pretended to reveal. They often amazed and terrified the inquirers out of their senses by their
pro-

processes and rites, calculated all to 'confound and bubble. Their answers were generally ambiguous, as we find by those on record ; by which they were alway enabled to evade the imputation of falsity : and yet with all their caution, they generally deceived, rather than satisfied their cajoled inquirers ; who felt their art and cunning, but found not their prescience or divine veracity. The whole was nothing but a combination of roguish impostors, whose sole art and skill lay in speciously deceiving the common people ; who, dup'd by their own ignorance and prejudices, as well as stupified by the previous processes of the priests, were prepared beforehand for deception.

And yet with all these arts and confederacies, the credit of these oracles began to droop and languish, about the time of our Saviour's advent. This has been generally attributed to the power and divinity of Jesus Christ, who silenced and confounded the infernal spirits, that informed and inspired those oracles. But this likewise is a vulgar error. Where all was at first priestly trick and delusion ; and where there was no demon to confound, or spirits to silence ; there wanted not any divine or superior power to extinguish or supersede them. It was the *learning* and inquisitiveness of the Augustean age, that checked the prevalence, and sunk the credit of the heathen oracles. And there needed no other influence but philosophy,

phy, and the exercise of a rational understanding, to detect and expose their rogueries and fallacies, and to shake the very foundations of the imposture.

For it must be owned, oracular divination did not totally expire upon our Saviour's appearance and ministry; nor till some centuries afterward. Nay, new oracles were created and erected after the commencement of christianity. But their credit sunk and abated, in proportion as learning and science flourished: till the fatal time that christianity began to grow Roman catholick; and then, with concern be it spoken, the whole system of heathenish superstition, and the whole train of cheat and imposture, became adopted into the church: and spread and flourished with no less success, than it had done under the Grecian management, and pagan priests.

The inundation of the northern nations into the Roman empire, contributed to this revolution. They overwhelmed the Roman power, and the Roman learning together: and by extinguishing science, they laid the foundation for the revival of superstition, delusion, and idolatry. They brought with them minds already impressed with *old* superstitions; and therefore of course the more susceptible of *new*. No sooner therefore were Roman arts and science, learning and philosophy extinguished; and Gothick barbarism, or monkish ignorance had seized their places; but we

see all the superstition, delusion, imposture, and credulity, that had duped the heathen world, revive again ; recover their ancient credit ; and rule the inflaved minds of the ignorant vulgar with more impudence and tyranny, than had been ever displayed before.

Hence arose a new scene of wonder-working, and a new idolatry : hence a credulity in conjurers, and witches, in demons, spirits, and apparitions, in omens, signs, and prognosticks, and all the trumpery of heathenish superstition, which erected again it's crest, and became re-established. For what wonder, that the errors and follies of paganism should recover themselves ; and captivate the minds of those people ; under the new shape, that popery gave them ? who for immemorial ages had been used to nothing else.

On the other side ; it became easy for the church of Rome to govern their ignorant votaries by their own self-delusions, and superstitions : and it was natural for them to encourage in the people those blind conceits and fancies ; by which they could most easily rule and enslave them. The priests would not fail to prompt a belief in their own adopted arts ; and encourage an opinion in those spirits, apparitions, and demons ; which none but themselves could raise, and lay again. These airy bubbles became so many powerful instruments in their hands, to augment the credit and importance of the hierarchy ; and to govern thereby

thereby the consciences of the deluded people. They therefore made as good use of it, as they still do of their auricular confessions, penances, and purgatory. Is not this what St. Paul predicted ?* — *That that wicked one shall be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth ; and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming : even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan ; with all power, and signs, and lying wonders : and with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness.*

By all this we see that the superstition we are exploding, is the mere child of ignorance and illiterature ; improved and cultivated by crafty designing cheats. Paganism begat it ; popery fostered, trained, and nursed it. It languished under the learning of the Augustean age ; but recovered more than all its former strength ; so soon as Gothick barbarism and monkish ignorance had stifled and extinguished that learning. And it is the spawn of these prejudices, so inveterated and confirmed ; that, in spite of the glorious reformation, we shall find the symptoms and remains of, to this very day.

We have now indeed wisdom and sense enough to deride the Jupiter, Apollo, and Mercury, of the heathens ; and to laugh at their pretended metamorphoses and miracles : we can justly suspect the miracles of the

* 2 Thef. ii. 8.

Roman catholicks ; and the silly virtues of holy water, to frighten away and disperse apparitions and spirits. And why is it more difficult to proceed to deride and laugh at those other creatures of their imposition and fraud, — spirits, witches, and demons themselves ? which nothing but the same superstition and deceit originally created ; and which are, and ought to be, as easily exploded and abolished ; by recourse to reason, and the common light of nature.

Of affinity to these oracles of Greece were the Sybilline books of the Romans. Their pretended origin bespeaks a cheat ; and their use, a palpable imposture. The books are said to have been bought at a very high price by Tarquin of an old woman of very strange appearance ; who, after burning six out of nine, which she first offered to the king ; still persisted to demand the same price for the remaining three : by advice of the augurs, who were consulted on so odd an occasion, the money was paid her ; and she immediately vanished away, and was never seen afterward.

What an ingenious foundation for divine veracity ! or rather, what a fine-spun thread of state policy ! — What reverence would such kind of oracles conciliate to themselves *now* ? what authority, do we think, laws, of such a marvellous origin, would carry with them at *this day* ? even when implicit faith and superstition are not totally extinguished among us.

But

But they might very well suit that age of most illiterate ignorance in which they commenced ; when even the very *use* of letters scarce seems to have been known to that people : and when (notwithstanding the exactness of their Ann: Urb: cond: afterward) even their best chronological tables were scarce began to be found in the annual *nails* driven into Jupiter's capitol.

These books were committed to the custody of certain patricians, chosen for that special purpose : it is no wonder then, whenever it was necessary to pacify the tumultuous passions of the people, raised either by publick calamity, or by injury, that upon consult a verse was sure to be found in them, directly adapted to the occasion. Whatever the policy of the state thought necessary to seek for ; they could not fail to find there. For who could dispute the truth ; or attempt to evince the cheat ? where none were permitted to see the sacred books, but those commissioned to keep and to search them : and whose business it was to support, as well as to invent the oracular dictates.

C H A P. IX.

The Conclusion.

FROM all that has been said, we may fairly deduce, how plainly and forceably reason declares against the vulgar opinion about witches, demons, augurys, divinations, omens, prognostications, oracles, apparitions, spirits,

spirits, and the whole tribe of such superstitious inventions. This is surely a sufficient ground for yielding at length to learning and wisdom ; and for exploding with contempt all senseless and absurd conceits about them.

But with reverence we say this, for those truly sacred pages ; which, it must be confessed, do make some mention of these airy existences ; and frequently speak of them, at least without any appearance of contradicting their reality. This is an argument, which ought to have just weight with well-disposed minds ; and be attended to by a religious and rational enquirer. But we have already seen, and observed, that the scriptures herein only accommodate themselves to vulgar opinions, and prejudices ; as may be easily allowed, where the *practice* of virtue is not interested ; or where the ignorance of the times was likely to resist and render ineffectual more refined doctrines : that those passages in general admit of a fair construction, consistent with the argument we are maintaining : and that they no where directly assert, or are intended to *teach* for divine truths the apparition of spirits ; or the powers of witches and demons.

Where reason then, and common sense contend so strenuously on one side ; we may fairly expect proportionable testimony on the other. It is not a contingent expression, adapted to the stile and prejudices of the times ; it is not an oblique or occasional diction of scrip-

Scripture language ; it is not a text of uncertain signification, or a vague mention of an abstruse point in scripture ; that should determine our opinions, in opposition to the dictates of solid reason. We may justly expect *plain* and *positive* assertions of scripture ; — texts without ambiguity or obscurity ; — doctrines as *direct* and *express* as those that command the practice of obedience and moral righteousness in the gospel ; — and which point solely and *intentionally* to the object to be believed ; whenever we are demanded to yield up our mental faculties to our faith. For nothing *less* can overthrow the presumptions of sound reason ; and establish it's own authority in it's stead.

But such a direct opposition between revelation and reason has never yet been found in scripture ; in any of it's articles or doctrines necessary to be believed. It is only the mistakes of fallible men, proceeding from prepossession, ignorance, or worse motives, that have ever raised the appearance of it. For divine and human wisdom are always the same, differing only in degree : nor can the voice of reason and of divine revelation ever interfere in reality ; whatever may have been falsely imagined : human passions, or prejudices, or short-sightedness may raise a doubt ; but never can create *opposition* between reason and revelation.

So that if passages in scripture, that point to some of the opinions we are exploding ; appear

pear indeterminate, obscure, doubtful, or inexplicable; or even on a sudden view, to favour them: yet are they very insufficient to build an implicit faith upon. But if, as it should seem, they admit of a fair interpretation, consistently with the hypothesis we are supporting: we may then leave them to the favourers of confusion and absurdity to make the most of; and to prop their prejudices, and vain imaginations with them. The strongest *imaginations* are generally in the weakest heads.

Away, away, then all superstition, the *child* of ignorance; but the *parent* of sin and folly. Let us strive to banish this old leaven of weakness, and wickedness; and to ingraft the word of truth, which is indeed the word of God. Let reason be our guide in the interpretation of scripture; and let reason and scripture together be the guides of our faith. Let us endeavour to improve our understandings with *rational* knowledge and wisdom; which will of course improve us in true religion. If our faith chance to be somewhat less; our lives and practices may be the better for it. Remember that the Lord our God is a jealous God: let us not then ascribe *his* power, nor give *his* honour to another. Let us remember also that the Son of God was manifested, for this very end and purpose,—that he might destroy the works of the devil.

F I N I S,

